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Closing the narrative gap: social media as a tool to reconcile institutional archival narratives with Indigenous counter-narratives

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ABSTRACT

Archives are an integral component in the formation of a nation's historical narratives. They are both repositories and sources of a nation's evidence of events. Institutional archives have been striving to incorporate equity and social justice for Indigenous peoples but their practice is still heavily skewed to colonists' perspectives. In this article, the author uses critical race theory to examine the social media narratives of Australia's institutional archives during National Reconciliation Week, coinciding with the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprising. She uses the concept of counter-narrative to demonstrate the gaps between narratives *about* Indigenous peoples and those *by* Indigenous peoples in contemporary archival narratives as portrayed in social media. She argues that to truly achieve equity and social justice for Indigenous peoples, archives must engage with Indigenous counter-narratives in their collecting and exhibiting practices and bring the institutional and Indigenous narratives closer together.

KEYWORDS

Counter-narrative; Indigenous activism; reconciliation; Black Lives Matter; social media; archives

Introduction

Long simmering tensions in the US relating to racial violence boiled over after George Floyd, an African-American man, was murdered by a Minneapolis police officer on the 25 May 2020.[1] Within a matter of days, the protests against the killing of Floyd morphed into Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in Minneapolis. The BLM protests rapidly spread across the United States and then to the rest of the world, including Australia. Indigenous Australians took to social media and then to the streets to draw attention to police violence and systemic racism in Australia. At the same time, Indigenous Australians had to defend their position to non-Indigenous Australians who had neither experienced, been educated about, nor believed that such violence and racism exist.

Ongoing conversations about the role that archives can play in social justice seem to suggest that social justice work is not possible within institutional archives.[2] I argue that a key step in social justice, framed as 'reconciliation' in Australia, is common understanding, and therefore closing the narrative gap between the non-Indigenous population and Indigenous peoples is imperative to achieving social justice. Archives are uniquely

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placed to assist in this work as they act as brokers of records that can corroborate or detract from the stories that build these narratives.

Since its development in the 1970s and 1980s by Bell, Delgado, Stefanic and Crenshaw,[3] Critical Race Theory (CRT) has become the framework by which systemic racism is measured globally. CRT has provided us with the concepts and vocabulary necessary to identify and deconstruct racism. Aileen Moreton-Robinson's *Talkin' up to the white woman*[4] situated CRT within feminism in Australia to argue that one standpoint cannot be considered a universal truth. An integral part of social justice work using CRT is challenging the long-held assumption that the white person's experience is a universal experience. Moreton-Robinson pointed to the 'counter-hegemonic discourse',[5] otherwise known as counter-narrative, introduced by Indigenous feminists as a method to reject the dominant paradigm of white feminism being representative of all women. *Talkin' up to the white woman* set a powerful precedent for using counter-narrative as a tool for social justice within the Australian context.

Social justice research has been propelled forward by the works of critical race scholars such as Moreton-Robinson, but social justice progress in Australia has been much slower outside academia. Each year we celebrate National Reconciliation Week (NRW), a week dedicated to the process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. NRW starts and ends with the commemoration of two historical events of Indigenous activism, the 1967 Referendum (27 May) and Mabo Day (3 June). In 2020, NRW happened to coincide with the lead up to nationwide Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, some of the largest Indigenous-led protests in the history of Australia. As a nation, we were simultaneously celebrating the history of Indigenous activism while at the same time witnessing large scale contemporary Indigenous activism. Despite the synergy between these historic events archival institutions claimed to celebrate NRW, while at the same time ignoring BLM.

Reconciliation Australia,[6] the organisation that has coordinated NRW activities for the past twenty years, states that NRW is 'a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures, and achievements, and to explore how each of us can contribute to achieving reconciliation in Australia.' NRW is a week for Indigenous Australia and wider Australian society to come together in common understanding and celebration. It is also a week that has the celebration of Indigenous activism at its very core, with the week being opened and closed by the commemoration of two acts of Indigenous activism. It is perhaps fitting then that NRW 2020 coincided with the build-up to massive Indigenous-led BLM protests around Australia. Moreover, it is indicative of the understanding of their role in reconciliation by national and state archives that none of them engaged with BLM during NRW.

While every media and social media channel was consumed with conversations about BLM, Australia's national and state memory institutions' social media channels remained silent on the topic. Institutions that have long espoused support for reconciliation in Australia remained silent while every other sector of Australian society debated the relevance of BLM to Australia. NRW happens each year, so, as a bare minimum, there should have already been content programmed to promote the NRW themes. In addition to that, the BLM uprising had been going for a month by the time NRW started which should have been time enough to find relevant content for social media feeds and formulate rapid collecting plans. The silence of galleries, archives, libraries and museums

(GLAM) might be seen by some as an attempt to remain neutral, but the choice to not engage with BLM during NRW demonstrated that GLAM institutions are more comfortable celebrating Indigenous activism long after the event has passed and the historical narrative for the event has been decided.

In this article, I explore the ways in which Indigenous peoples used social media to generate a narrative about BLM that included lived experiences, family histories and activism. I then scrutinise the social media narratives of Australia's GLAM institutions during NRW (27 May – 3 June 2020) and examine how they align with the institutes' reconciliation commitments, specifically their commitments to support Indigenous peoples in determining their own narratives. I analyse these narratives through a critical race theory lens which positions BLM and Indigenous activism as a counter-narrative to the prevailing narrative of the colonial state. I relate the GLAM institutions silences to the concepts of symbolic annihilation and contemporary and historical denial. This article concludes by seeking to highlight the work already being done in archives that uses social media as a tool to not only support Indigenous peoples in their own narratives, but as a way for GLAM institutions to close the gap between their narratives and the narratives of Indigenous peoples.

The narrative gap

When protests about George Floyd's murder erupted, Indigenous people across Australia were quick to voice their solidarity with the US protesters. Like the US, Australia has a long history of police violence and Black/Blak[7] deaths in custody. This history had previously resulted in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1987. Despite the Royal Commission, by June 2020, there had been over 430 additional Aboriginal deaths in custody since the close of the commission.[8] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had their own stories to tell about police violence.

State violence, enacted through the police, against Indigenous Australians took on new powers with the passing of the Aborigines Protection Act in 1909. It was in the era of assimilation brought on by this Act that the early activist groups for Aboriginal peoples' rights, like the Australian Aborigines League (AAL) and the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA) were formed in 1933 and 1937 respectively. One of the best-known Aboriginal activists in Australia, Gary Foley, detailed notable points in the history of Indigenous activism in monthly essays in Tracker Magazine from 2011 to 2012.[9] Included were the founding of the Australian-Aboriginal Fellowship (AAF) in 1956 and their subsequent successful campaign which resulted in the 1967 Referendum, which is now celebrated on the first day of NRW.[10]

While Indigenous activism is as much a part of Australian history as colonialism, it is much less celebrated in national historical narratives. Indigenous activism is often debated for its validity or shouted down by those that do not want to talk about the violence of Australian history. Some ongoing activism has been misrepresented, such as 26 January protests against 'Australia Day', which mainstream media described as 'riots'.[11] Historians such as Henry Reynolds[12] have written extensively about Indigenous activism but academic historiographical discourses have remained primarily in academia and have not filtered through into mainstream media and institutional narratives.

To some extent, social media sidesteps bias in mainstream media reporting by allowing Indigenous Australians to share their stories and activism in their own voice. It also allows them to connect directly with each other through social media platforms. These two unique abilities of social media meant that Indigenous Australians were able to build their own BLM narrative separate to that of the dominant narratives produced by government and mainstream media.

Not long after the initial reaction to the death of George Floyd, Indigenous people in Australia had their support for BLM challenged. The Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, stated that Indigenous Australians should not 'draw equivalence' to America's problems.[13] He then justified his comment by trying to distance the colonisation of Australia from that of the US by saying the colony of New South Wales was founded 'with the intent of there being no slavery'.[14] The intention of the Prime Minister may have been to dampen the activism of Indigenous peoples by perpetuating a long-held belief by some sectors of Australian society that systemic racism and police violence do not exist here. This narrative was further reinforced by an Australian news journalist who, while interviewing an African-American man at a BLM protest in Los Angeles, closed her interview with the comment, Australia 'doesn't have the understanding of the history of police killings here'.[15]

This enduring ability to disassociate ourselves from colonist systems and their associated systemic racism in other countries is described as 'colonial aphasia' by Ann Laura Stoler.[16] Stoler coined the term 'colonial aphasia' to describe the phenomenon of French people claiming that racism is an American problem, not a French one, the very same thing that occurred in Australia during BLM. At various points in *Duress*, Stoler describes colonial aphasia as the lack of context, misrecognition, limited access and vocabulary, all of which results in a narrative that occludes the perspectives of those that have been colonised. The comments of Morrison and of the journalist demonstrate colonial aphasia and serve to highlight that two very different narratives of Australian history are at play in Australia.

Prior to social media, the government and mainstream media had almost absolute control of the national narratives. However, in 2020, comments like the Prime Minister's and the Nine News journalist's were met with a swift backlash on social media. Some used hashtags to draw attention to specific cases of deaths in custody, such as #justiceforta nyaday and #justiceforkumanjayiwalker. Others posted using hashtags that highlighted systemic racism in certain fields, such as #blackintheivory, which curated stories of racism and bias in academia. Indigenous writers, academics, journalists and protest organisers expressed their voices through NITV[17] and IndigenousX.[18] The narrative *by* Indigenous people differed greatly from the narrative *about* Indigenous people.

What was compelling about the BLM uprising was the way each narrative placed Indigenous people in the history of Australia. The colonist narrative would have us believe that the British came with good intent to bring enlightenment to the passive First Peoples, and that all colonist decisions were made with the best interests of Indigenous peoples at heart. Further to that is the argument that any contemporary disparity between the living standards, health outcomes and incarceration rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples is solely due to the actions of the Indigenous peoples. The colonist narrative, perpetuated by the governments of Australia, again and again downplays the impact and relentlessness of colonial violence on Indigenous peoples. The cherry on the top of this narrative is the argument that Indigenous peoples have done nothing to resist this colonial violence.

And yet, when Indigenous people raise their voices in protest to put forth their counter-narrative,[19] whether that be online or in the streets, they are maligned by the government and mainstream media or ignored by the institutions that claim to be working in support of reconciliation. While Indigenous activism is beginning to be recognised in historical narratives and GLAM institutions, it is being recognised through a telescopic, retrospective lens. This position of viewing Indigenous activism from afar is less problematic for GLAM institutions because it allows them to adopt the narrative of the victors once the dust has mostly settled on the intense debates that inevitably result from activism. This position might be understandable when considering historical activism, but the result during the BLM uprising was that it left GLAM institutions sitting mutely in the narrative gap during NRW 2020. This puts the institutions at odds with the reconciliation goals they claim.

In the past several years, GLAM institutions have adopted Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs), protocols, and most recently in the archive sector, the Tandanya Adelaide Declaration as guiding frameworks for making collecting, managing and exhibiting practices more inclusive of Indigenous worldviews. Central to these initiatives is an expression of intent by national and state GLAM institutions to be an ally in reconciliation efforts within Australia.

In 2020, the twentieth anniversary of NRW under Reconciliation Australia, the theme 'In This Together' (not to be confused with the same mantra being used in COVID-19 discussions) was based on the premise that:

(a) Reconciliation is a journey for all Australians – as individuals, families, communities, organisations and importantly as a nation. At the heart of this journey are relationships between the broader Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
(b) We strive towards a more just, equitable nation by championing unity and mutual respect as we come together and connect with one another.
(c) On this journey, Australians are all In This Together; every one of us has a role to play when it comes to reconciliation, and in playing our part we collectively build relationships and communities that value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories and cultures.[20]

What better time then, for Australian memory institutions to step up in their roles of recordkeepers to support reconciliation, to play their part, than during NRW?

In their 2014–2015 Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), the National Archives of Australia (NAA) stated their two main roles in relation to reconciliation as being:

- to preserve Australia's most valuable government records and encourage their use by the public
- to promote good information management by Australian Government agencies.[21]

It then goes on to say that:

> Our continued engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities will assist us in identifying, describing and promoting records of particular

> relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, developing appropriate services, and encouraging the use of records.[22]

Determining relevance of records to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples is not difficult when tens of thousands of Indigenous people are speaking out on social media, online articles and blogs. In two such blog articles, I personally called out the silence of Australia's institutional archives in relation to BLM.[23] Wiradjuri scholar, Sandy O'Sullivan, posted a corpus of work by Black/Blak writers, journalists, academics, lawyers, media and health workers that gives their perspectives on racism and/or BLM.[24] These are just two examples of many posts, tweets, updates and articles where Indigenous people related their lived experience to those around the world who rose up under the banner of BLM.

Of course, social media is not just a tool for activists, GLAM institutions already use social media to engage with their users and encourage use of their collections. Never was this more so than during the COVID lockdowns of 2020. The ability of institutions to engage with the public in person was drastically reduced as GLAM institutions closed, therefore during this period social media became one of the key channels of communication and exhibition between institutions and the public. Unfortunately, GLAM institutions missed the opportunity to rapidly react to the growing BLM discussions and tie it into their NRW programming on their social media channels.

What could have been a shining moment for GLAM institutions to show their value in the reconciliation process instead shone a spotlight on the performative allyship of many GLAM institutions. On 27 May 2020, many GLAM institutions published posts to mark the start of NRW. These posts ranged in depth from a simple repost of the NRW 2020 artwork and hashtags, through to thoughtful posts that explored what NRW stands for and how that institution supports reconciliation through its recordkeeping and initiatives. Not one institution mentioned BLM. Many published more posts throughout the week, but again, nobody talked about the massive Indigenous uprising taking place online and outside the institution walls during that week.

The social media narratives of Australia's GLAM institutions during NRW not only failed to support the Australian public in being properly informed on topics that require open and frank discussions for reconciliation, they also failed to support Indigenous people trying to do the work that memory institutions should be doing. Across the varying degrees of engagement with Indigenous history, reconciliation and activism from the institutions, not one of the institutions published a statement about BLM, and precious few published posts that discussed records they hold as evidence of Australia's ongoing difficulty in coming to terms with racism.

NRW was a missed opportunity for Australia's institutional archives to demonstrate their support for Indigenous peoples in their self-determination, including Indigenous peoples' narratives about their lived experiences under colonisation. The BLM protests were an act of self-determination by Indigenous peoples to say, not only that they reject police violence and systemic racism, but that they reject the normalisation of these phenomena and will continue to talk about them and fight against them. 'White silence is violence' is not just a protest slogan, it is literally saying that silence is consent for further racism and violence. By not engaging with the counter-narratives of Indigenous peoples, and by not including those narratives within their own, GLAM institutions lend

their silent consent to ongoing wilful ignorance of Australia's violence against Indigenous peoples.

A carefully placed window

The exclusion of BLM from the narratives of national and state memory institutions is so pervasive that it indicates a systemic problem with archives. Just a year after the 1967 Referendum, Stanner said of the lack of Aboriginal history in history books that:

> … inattention on such a scale cannot possibly be explained by absent-mindedness. It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale. We have been able for so long to disremember the aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so.[25]

Stanner's comment, made in his 1968 Boyer Lecture, came on the heels of the 1967 Referendum. The timing indicates that as far back as the late 1960s there was hope that the referendum would result in Indigenous people being included in Australian history. More than fifty years on, the habit of carefully placed windows so as to exclude certain narratives continues.

Over the course of Australia's colonised history there has been a determined effort to selectively remember or forget certain stories. This practice of 'contemporary denial' and 'historical denial'[26] can be closely linked to the resulting historical narratives that we have in Australia. Massacres of Aboriginal people became referred to as 'dispersals'; the vagueness of the term made it easier to downplay the effects of the mass genocide. The contemporary denial that happened at the time of these 'dispersals' has resulted in a persistent historical denial that they ever took place. The simple fact is, if events are not recorded as they happen, or are recorded sporadically from an outsider point of view, they are likely to be misremembered, if remembered in historical narratives at all.

Selective narratives can happen on a macro and micro level. In the past, Black activism has focused on the experiences of cis-gendered, heterosexual Black men. The BLM movement, led by three Black women, has the mission to include the voices of women, queer, disabled, incarcerated and undocumented Black people in their movement.[27] Caswell and O'Sullivan have written extensively about how symbolic annihilation in archives has been a tool used by colonists to erase communities and perspectives from their carefully constructed narratives for centuries.[28] Social media is one of the few avenues that Indigenous peoples, and the nuanced communities and identities within First Nations, have for combatting that erasure.

Amplifying Indigenous narratives on social media

Social media gives Indigenous peoples the platform to put across their counter-narratives. This was clearly the case with BLM, but Indigenous peoples have a strong history of connecting and speaking out on social media. In a 2018 study, Carlson and Frazer found that Indigenous peoples in Australia have a high uptake

and are early adopters of social media.[29] Additionally, 79% of the study respondents were politically active on social media. Carlson and Frazer found that social media increasingly plays a central role in the organisation of Indigenous activism, that is, Indigenous peoples often use social media to discuss and petition for change about the topics that are most relevant to them.[30] Social media is an area that memory institutions should be paying close attention to, to understand the contemporary narratives of Indigenous peoples.

Social media allows Indigenous peoples to share news and respond quickly to events as well as to the portrayal of these events by the government and mainstream media. At times, traumatic events act as reminders of ongoing colonisation and spark collective outrage, or 'shared recognition'[31] from Indigenous peoples. BLM was one such event that prompted shared recognition on a national scale. The *Australia Day Your Way* campaign and a racist cartoon about Indigenous fathers are other recent examples of how Indigenous peoples' shared recognition of narratives of colonisation resulted in them using social media to voice their own counter-narratives. In the case of *Australia Day Your Way*, Indigenous social media users co-opted the #AustraliaDay hashtag by posting #SurvivalDay and #InvasionDay in the same post.[32] When a racist cartoon portraying Indigenous fathers as drunkards was published in an Australian newspaper, social media was flooded with posts by Indigenous peoples' pride for their fathers under the hashtag #IndigenousDads.[33]

Understanding which records and historical narratives are relevant to Indigenous peoples is not a mystery. Indigenous people actively represent themselves on social media and have time and again used social media to put forward their narrative on topics that they consider relevant. During NRW 2020, and leading up to it, every media and social media channel was flooded with conversations about BLM. Any institution that thought the BLM uprising was a fad linked solely to George Floyd's death was not paying attention to the narrative of Indigenous peoples. This ties directly back to the theme of NRW 2020, 'In This Together', which calls for all Australians, whether they be individuals or institutions, to value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, worldviews and lived experience.

Closing the narrative gap

The reasons Australian archival institutions failed to use their social media platforms to engage with Indigenous BLM counter-narratives during NRW 2020 are undoubtedly complex. Lack of diversity of staff, particularly in the senior levels of archives, limits the perspectives and lived experience that inform collecting and exhibiting choices. Those not active themselves on social media may have failed to recognise how central it is to the BLM uprising and how it is increasingly the place where the narratives of our modern society are developed and shared.

While corporations, media outlets, politicians and activists are now firmly entrenched in the use of social media to convey their narratives and to stay abreast of current issues, GLAM institutions are still yet to fully appreciate the importance of social media to their role of preserving and exhibiting the various narratives of the nation. In many institutions, social media is managed by junior staff who may not feel empowered to post about sensitive issues, or have been mandated to stick to feel-good stories. Staff at all levels of

national and state funded institutions are often bound by codes of conduct agreements that discourage involvement with the topical issues that are discussed across social media platforms. And more broadly, social media may not be considered a primary exhibition space or narrative vehicle for institutions. Each institution will have its own reasons and this article is not intended to address all of them.

In considering how to overcome these issues archives could benefit from revisiting the work of archivists whose research explores the experience of staff whose values or lived experiences are at odds with the institutions they work for. Cassie Findlay has noted that government funding can provide assurance and stability to institutions but may also serve to limit social justice agendas within institutions.[34] Archivists sometimes struggle to align their personal values with the institute they work for, moreover they are often bound by the institute's code of conduct which can inhibit individual archivists' ability to support counter-narratives through their work. Kirsten Thorpe's research examines how Indigenous staff, already severely underrepresented in the archive profession, can feel culturally unsafe at work in institutions as the singular representative of Indigenous communities to the archive and vice versa.[35]

One possible alternative is working in small community archives that have more freedom to support activism but may struggle with funding and have less reach. Findlay refers to Andrew Flinn's 2011 article, 'Archival Activism', in which he discussed the 'counter-hegemonic public history-making activities' of community archives that have sought to 'address gaps in official traditional archives'.[36] This model of archive, which I am defining as a counter-narrative archive, is crucially important to recording the counter-narratives of Black/Blak and Indigenous communities.

Since Flinn's article was published in 2011, the counter-narrative archives model has been used to create BLM archives such as the Documenting Ferguson and Preserve the Baltimore Uprising 2015 Project.[37] Both of these archives are digital archives which contain many born digital records such as oral histories, photos of protests and radio program recordings from the communities that planned, attended and supported these protests. These archives, and others like them, exist to challenge prevailing narratives, but they also serve to strengthen the movement through recordkeeping and evidence sharing. Counter-narrative archives also serve the important function of letting Black/Blak and Indigenous communities know that they are being heard and valued. The next iteration in counter-narrative archives is to see counter-narratives find their way into the narratives put forth by institutional archives.

By and large national and state archives have avoided stepping into topical conversations, but there are examples where this has happened. Nova Scotia Archive's timely educative Twitter post about the treaties between Mi'kmaq and the colonial government of Canada is one such example.[38] The Nova Scotia Archives published their tweet as non-indigenous fishers threatened Mi'kmaq fishers pursuing their right to catch lobster outside of the commercial lobster season. This right was granted to them by the Canadian Supreme Court in accordance with the Mi'kmaq treaty with the Canadian government.[39] The Nova Scotia Archives' tweet managed to add to the discussion without expressly indicating support for either side of the debate. It urged people to educate themselves about the treaty and gave

a link to the document in their archives which provides context that contributes to narratives about the nuances in fishers' rights in Nova Scotia. With this tweet the Nova Scotia Archives demonstrated that it is possible to remain neutral without hiding behind a wall of silence.

Three Smithsonian museums, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the National Museum of American History and the Anacostia Community Museum, enacted a rapid response to the BLM uprising in the Washington D.C. area by collecting the signs from Lafayette Square BLM protests in Washington D.C., stating:

> Recognizing that the tragic killing of George Floyd has spurred a transformative time in U.S. history, the Smithsonian Institution is collecting today so that the world, in the present and future, can understand the role that race has played in our complicated 400-year history. This coalition of museums will enable Smithsonian curators to work together with activists and groups on the ground to ensure that this grassroots-led community movement and pivotal moment is accurately documented.[40]

Along similar lines, the New York Historical Society established a 'History Responds' initiative which 'collects history as it's unfolding'.[41] The initiative has seen the institution collect records of *Occupy Wall Street*, BLM, *March for Our Lives*, Climate Strikes and the 2017 Women's Marches. Similarly, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London collected the Pussyhat of Jayna Zweiman, a co-founder of the Pussyhat Project which created the iconic knitted hat that millions of women wore at the 2017 Women's Marches around the globe.[42]

Rapid response comes not only in the form of collecting but also through the words of GLAM leadership. Lonnie Bunch, the Smithsonian Institute's secretary, in demonstrating support for BLM said, 'The protest is always the way those who are voiceless speak'.[43] Kevin Gover, Director of Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian said, ' … we are not powerless. The existence of our museum is a blow to racism'.[44] Gover went on to spell out ways in which the Smithsonian incorporates anti-racism into their practice, including providing interactive tools for members of the public. One such example is the 'Talking About Race' toolkit which offers tailored resources and cues for discussing race and racism through interaction with their website.[45]

Of the examples above, none are from Australia. That is not to say that there is not some good work being done in Australia. During NRW, the State Library of Queensland (SLQ) promoted its oral histories of Indigenous Australians in its 'Amplify' collection. The program provides users a practical way to be involved in helping to give access to first-person accounts of First Nations Australians by inviting them to transcribe the oral histories. The National Museum of Australia (NMA) published a post on the first day of NRW that explained the history of NRW and gave information about the relevant records they hold in their collections. The State Library of New South Wales (SLNSW) promoted an online talk about the 1970s Town Hall activism of Indigenous people such as Oodgeroo Noonuccal, a nod to the long history of Indigenous activism in Australia.

While SLQ, NMA, SLNSW and others not listed in this article provide encouraging examples of institutions supporting understanding of Indigenous lived experiences and past activism, we are yet to see support for Indigenous activism from state and national

archives in Australia *at the time* the topical conversation is happening. Many of Australia's state and national archives did eventually put out collection calls for ephemera from BLM protests, but these calls mostly came *after* the events had transpired. Many institutions developed collecting strategies for BLM, but they did not consistently promote these collecting strategies to the general public via their social media (thereby demonstrating that the uprising was a significant event in Australian history) in the same way they did for COVID ephemera collecting. No national or state archive promoted BLM collection calls during NRW, leading up to the BLM protests, and no institutional archive released a position statement on BLM at the time of the uprising or afterwards. This was despite the BLM uprising happening concurrently with NRW, which was expressly themed around all Australian's doing their part to value Indigenous perspectives. What is perhaps most damning is that these institutions did not use their platforms, and the opportunity of NRW, to promote records that would inform the public about the issues that BLM was fighting for.

During the BLM uprising, my blog articles about the silence of institutional archives raised attention to the fact that there were no collection calls out for ephemera from BLM protests. The protests were some of the largest planned by Indigenous peoples in Australia's history, and yet it did not warrant a mass collection call by institutional archives in the lead up to the protests. This missed the opportunity for en vivo collecting and the ability to gather ephemera and stories as the events were unfolding. Not only that, but the archives failed to work with the Indigenous organisers of the protests and as a consequence, records about the planning and decisions process, the acts of agency by Indigenous peoples, have not been collected.

In contrast, institutional archives had clearly demonstrated their interest in COVID-19 with active collection calls for COVID-19 ephemera through their social media channels. National and state libraries and archives promoted COVID-19 ephemera collection calls on their websites, Instagram, Twitter and, in some cases, through their newsletters. There is no doubt that COVID-19 is an important event that warrants being recorded in archives due to the impact it has had on our lives. It has changed the way we live and interact, has been a major concern for the entire population, and in the direst cases has resulted in the loss of lives. By these same metrics, BLM should also warrant a mass collection call by memory institutions.

The missed opportunity to create a BLM collection is not surprising considering that Australian memory institutions are not in the habit of creating new collections about issues relevant to modern Indigenous Australia as they are happening in the same way as they do for events that affect broader Australian society. Archives need to broaden their perception of relevant records to go beyond cultural information and retrospective memory making about Indigenous peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are still here existing and living and evolving today, and our modern culture and lives are just as important to the history of Australia as our traditional culture and lives. As we continue to fight for Indigenous rights, social media and protest will remain key components of modern Indigenous cultures.

It is well within the capabilities of national and state archives to adopt Indigenous counter-narratives into their collecting and exhibiting through social media. These archives can use the channels already available to exhibit the currently held records that contain information necessary for a properly informed discussion about issues

around racism and its reality throughout Australian history. All Australian archival institutions have social media channels, websites and online exhibition spaces. These channels are already used to share information about records and collections that the archives hold; the institutions need to be more strategic about which records they share on these channels.

National and state archives have a number of solutions within their reach to bring Indigenous counter-narratives into their institutional narratives. Some solutions require a long-term culture shift, such as greater diversity of staff at all levels of archives to integrate multiple perspectives as part of the institutions' practice. Others are at the fingertips of archives right now, such as the development of rapid response collecting policies, and shifting the perception of social media from an ancillary function to a central tool for collecting, promoting and exhibiting records. Valuing social media as an important space of record production and exhibition (in COVID times it may be an institutions' most visited exhibition space) can offer both cultural and tangible shifts in archival practice that have the power to inform national narratives about social justice issues.

Conclusion

State and national memory institutions in Australia made a commitment to support reconciliation in Australia through their practice. Part of this commitment was to recognise the issues that are important to Indigenous peoples and to collect, maintain and share records that support Indigenous perspectives. During NRW 2020, these same institutions failed to recognise the importance of the Indigenous-led BLM movement in Australia. The belated or lack of collection calls for BLM ephemera from some of the largest Indigenous-led protests Australia has ever seen revealed that memory institutes failed to value the powerful first-person Indigenous narratives and agency that led to mass uprisings a few days after NRW had concluded.

By comparing the social media narratives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous institutions in this article, I demonstrated that there is a significant narrative gap in the stories *about* Indigenous peoples and stories *by* Indigenous peoples. These gaps in the social media narrative are indicative of a broader failure by memory institutions to recognise the stories that are relevant to Indigenous peoples. In an attempt to remain neutral, archives have missed an opportunity to build significant collections that document Indigenous activism against systemic racism, symbolic annihilation and contemporary and historical denial. Furthermore, national and state archives have missed an opportunity to be a significant part of the reconciliation process. If state and national memory institutions are serious about their commitments to reconciliation they must engage with Indigenous counter-narratives and make them a central part of their collecting, management and exhibiting practice.

Just as archives have been used as a tool of colonisation, counter-narratives can be used as a tool to dismantle colonial certitude in historical narratives in settler-colonial nations. Archives have an opportunity to redeem themselves by being active participants in this process. Institutional archives can be valuable partners in this process as they are uniquely placed to contribute to bridging the narrative gap. Institutional

archives are needed to normalise these counter-narratives and centre them within the dominant narrative so that all Australians can see, hear and understand them. It is only through closing the narrative gaps and forming a common understanding of the Indigenous experience within Australian history that we can have any hope of being in this together.

Notes

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